

Information Resources

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Publication Reference Notes

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Funded by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services,
Medicaid Infrastructure Grant, CFDA # 93.768, WI Department
of Health services/Pathways to Independence



Wisconsin Peer Specialist Employment Initiative

Employer Guidebook



Improving Recovery Outcomes



Introduction & History...

In 1996, Wisconsin Governor Tommy Thompson formed the Blue Ribbon Commission on Mental Health. This body was charged with examining how Wisconsin's mental health services could be improved. This Commission recommended that Wisconsin services should focus on the recovery process¹. These recommendations underscore the importance of providing Peer Specialist services to consumers.

Wisconsin already recognizes Peer Specialists in the Comprehensive Community Services Rule and is working to incorporate this provider position throughout the service system.

In 2009 the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Division of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services agreed to hold the certification for Peer Specialists. This certification states that a person has passed the approved training and certification exam. Certified Peer Specialists are also required to complete continuing education hours based on the program's core competencies in order to maintain their certification. All Certified Peer Specialists agree to adhere to the program Code of Conduct.

"In a recovery-oriented system, mental health consumers rebuild meaningful lives while decreasing their dependence on the system. They participate in **services that enable them to recover rather than become long-term users of the mental health system. **From a therapeutic as well as an economic standpoint, this approach has great appeal.**"**

- Wisconsin's Blue Ribbon Commission on Mental Health¹



The United States Surgeon General also stated that providing recovery services is instrumental to improving mental health outcomes²

The Center for Medicare & Medicaid Service [CMS] states that, "Peer support services are an evidence-based mental health model of care ...the experience of peer support providers, as consumers of mental health and substance use services, can be an important component in a State's delivery of effective treatment."³. CMS has reaffirmed its commitment to State flexibility for consumers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Acknowledgement is given to The Peer Specialist Committee for their dedication and exemplary work in assisting to make the Wisconsin Certified Peer Specialist Program a reality.

Sue Schuler (co-chair), Ginger Fobart (co-chair), Dee Truhn, Andrew Barnhill, Bethann Burazin, Molly Cisco, Mike Demares, Dianne Greenley, Maria Hanson, Laleña Lampe, Beth Lavender, Richard Machotka, Jim Maddox, Jonathan Makool, Karen Milstein, Shelley Monroe, Mary Neubauer, Joan Sternweis, Wendy Warren

Wisconsin Association of Peer Specialists (WAPS) **"Bridging Services thru Collaborative Communication"**

The Wisconsin Association of Peer Specialists is revolutionizing the mental health system statewide by promoting, supporting and advocating for the profession of Peer Specialist.

The Wisconsin Association of Peer Specialists works in close collaboration with the National Association of Peer Specialists.

The Association promotes recovery, inspires hope and encourages recovery through community education; creates a professional network of Peer Specialists to provide employment opportunities via newsletter, website and a forum list serve; creates job opportunities with fair compensation; promotes Peer Specialist as a career profession by defining roles and improving standards and practices; markets the effectiveness of Peer Specialists within mental health services; protects and advocates for the rights of Peer Specialists and connects Peer Specialists statewide to build a statewide network of resources and support.

As a collective voice we believe Peer Specialists move forward in their own recovery while helping others; contribute to reducing stigma in society, on the job, among our peers and ourselves; are proactive and courageous leaders, fighting for the rights of others; adhere to the code of ethics; strengthen the relationship between peers and their providers through collaborative relationships and empower their peers and are living examples of Recovery and its possibilities.

[See back page for contact information]

Consumer Testimonials...



My Peer Specialist has a large knowledge base of regulations and resources and she never makes things intimidating or condescending. Peer Specialists are very valuable.

...Mark Y.

Having a Peer Specialist is very important to my recovery. We work as a team to set goals and be successful. I am able to live more independently and go to school and work.

...Anne B.



Employer Testimonial...

As Clinical Director of the Milwaukee County Intensive Day Treatment Program I have witnessed the tremendous impact of Peer Support Specialists (PSS) in co-leading treatment groups in our Dialectical Behavior Therapy Program and on our Stabilization and Recovery Team. PSS are uniquely suited to provide the core DBT healing component of *validation*. By sharing their experiences of loss and suffering and emotional dysregulation they provide a depth of understanding and meaning that can only come from “one who has been there”. PSS thereby greatly assist peers in engaging in this intense treatment and provide living demonstrations of why it is worth the effort to keep practicing DBT.

On the S & R Team, PSS connect with and relate to the experiences of persons with psychosis, many of whom are reeling from the terror and confusion of a “first break”. They validate their experiences, help them accept the reality of their symptoms, yet most importantly, provide hope through real life examples that Recovery is Possible.

John E. Prestby, PhD

Clinical Program Director Day Treatment Program ♦ Milwaukee County Behavioral Health Division ♦ Milwaukee, WI

What a Peer Specialist is...



A Peer Specialist is a person who has not only lived the experience of mental illness but also has had formal training in the peer specialist model of mental health supports. They use their unique set of recovery experiences in combination with solid skills training to support peers who have mental illness. Peer Specialists actively incorporate peer support into their work while working within an agency's team support structure as a defined part of the recovery team.

A Peer Specialist is a job title within the agency of employment where the role of a peer specialist is specific to the lived experience of that specialist and how that experience is utilized to help others move forward on their recovery journey. **A Peer Specialist** is not a mental health technician limited to providing ancillary services without a clear therapeutic role, (i.e. driving people, laundry, and med deliveries), but an active participant on the consumer's treatment and recovery team.

On being a Peer Specialist...

By Maria E. Hanson, JD

One 14 year old boy said he could never go college because he was bi-polar. I first explained that a diagnosis was not the whole but only a part of him. Then I shared my story of the dark years, where only deep down under the darkness and destruction of my spirit a spark fought to survive. Being a peer specialist gave me the opportunity to share my journey and let in the light so that this young man may see the future with hope. This is just one story, but I have seen my life touch other lives and we have joined together as a team for healing. As I tell my story they tell their stories and together we create a place that does not bind us to an illness but lights the way to recovery.

What Peer Specialists Do...

The Role of the Certified Peer Specialist is varied and can take on several forms of support and assistance. Although roles may vary in service agencies, it is generally recognized that Peer Specialists provide the following services:

- ◆ Use personal recovery experience as a tool
- ◆ Present recovery information
- ◆ Provide information about mental health resources
- ◆ Assist in identifying and supporting consumers in crisis
- ◆ Facilitate self-direction and goal setting
- ◆ Communicate effectively with other treatment providers



Where Peer Specialists are Employed...

- ◆ Emergency Rooms
- ◆ Crisis Services
- ◆ In and Outpatient Care
- ◆ Veteran's Hospitals
- ◆ Supported Living Arrangements
- ◆ Prisons and Forensic Areas
- ◆ Community Resource Centers
- ◆ Drop In Centers and Clubhouses
- ◆ CSP-Community Support Program
- ◆ CCS-Comprehensive Community Services
- ◆ ADRC's-Aging and Disability Resource Center
- ◆ Family Care

Peer Specialists IMPROVE Outcomes...

The positive consumer outcomes of Peer Specialists are well documented throughout the United States.

- ◆ A longitudinal study of 104 consumers found that clients who received services from teams with Peer Specialists, "posted the **largest gains** on 20 of 31 measures." These effects were greatest in the areas of self image, outlook and social support.⁴
- ◆ Resnick and Rosenheck's study of 296 Veteran consumers found that those who worked with Peer Specialists showed **superior outcomes** on the Global Assessment of Functioning, Mental Health Confidence Scale and Activities of Daily Living Scale.⁵
- ◆ A 2008 study in the *American Journal of Psychiatric Rehabilitation* states that, based on the existing research concerning consumer provider (CP) outcomes, the inclusion of a Peer Specialist as a team member may **ultimately result in improved client outcomes for the entire team.**⁶
- ◆ Dumont and Jones studied 25 New York Consumers with DSM-III R (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Third Edition*) diagnosis who were randomly assigned access to inpatient Peer Support or traditional care. They found that, over just one year, the test groups average cost for their expanded set of **services was \$4,831 less per person** than the cost of the control groups with standard care.²

